

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04658 01 OF 02 271700Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6915

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4658

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, IS, JO

SUBJECT: THE NEGATIVE NATIONAL CONSENSUS AND THE WEST BANK: A

BRIEF COMMENTARY

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 4581, (B) TEL AVIV 4281

BEGIN SUMMARY: BEGIN AND DAYAN HAVE NOW SAID SEVERAL
TIMES THAT A CONSENSUS EXISTS IN ISRAEL
AGAINST THE WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 BORDERS AND
AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN STATE.
THAT CONSENSUS IS ESSENTIALLY A NEGATIVE ONE AND
STATES THAT ISRAELIS ARE OPPOSED TO WITHDRAWAL AND
A PALESTINIAN STATE INTER ALIA FOR SECURITY REASONS. HOW-
EVER, THERE IS NO POSITIVE CONSENSUS ABOUT WHAT ISRAEL
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04658 01 OF 02 271700Z

OUGHT TO ACCEPT IN COUNTER-DISTINCTION TO WHAT THEY
OUGHT NOT TO ACCEPT ON THE WEST BANK. WE BELIEVE

BEGIN AND DAYAN HAVE BLURRED THE DISTINCTION
BETWEEN THE NEGATIVE CONSENSUS WHICH DOES EXIST
AND THE POSITIVE CONSENSUS WHICH DOES NOT.
AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, DISAGREEMENTS

ABOUT THE WEST BANK HAS BEEN A PART OF ISRAELI HISTORY AND DEBATE CONTINUES TODAY BETWEEN THOSE WHO FAVOR SOME KIND OF COMPROMISE AND THOSE WHO FAVOR RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK. THE LATTER, HEADED BY BEGIN AND DAYAN, HOLD THE UPPER HAND TODAY AND WE BELIEVE THAT ANY MEANINGFUL OPPOSITION TO BEGIN AND DAYAN IS UNLIKELY, AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER MEETS WITH THE PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY

1. BEGIN AND DAYAN HAVE STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN RECENT DAYS THAT THERE IS A NATIONAL CONSENSUS IN ISRAEL, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE PARTIES OF THE FAR LEFT (SHELLI AND RAKAH), AGAINST WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 BORDERS--EVEN WITH MINOR ADJUSTMENTS-- AND AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WEST BANK/GAZA PALESTINIAN STATE. THEY HAVE MADE THESE STATEMENTS IN ORDER TO BUTTRESS THEIR POSITION AGAINST THE PUBLICLY-STATE U.S. APPROACH TO ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS AS DESCRIBED MOST RECENTLY IN VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE'S SAN FRANCISCO SPEECH. THEY CLAIM THAT THEIR POSITION REFLECTS NOT SIMPLY THEIR PERSONAL VIEW NOR THAT OF THE PARTIES IN THE GOVERNING COALITION, BUT RATHER THE JUDGMENT OF VIRTUALLY ALL ISRAELIS. WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH IN MORE PRECISE TERMS

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 04658 01 OF 02 271700Z

WHAT THIS CONSENSUS IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT.

2. THE POSITION DESCRIBED BY BEGIN AND DAYAN IS ESSENTIALLY A NEGATIVE NATIONAL CONSENSUS. IT PORTRAYS ACCURATELY THE PREDOMINANT ISRAELI VIEW THAT ISRAEL'S SECURITY WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLY JEOPARDIZED BY WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 LINES, EVEN WITH MINOR ADJUSTMENTS (SEE REFTEL A). THESE BORDERS WERE REPEATEDLY CHARACTERIZED BY THE OUTGOING RABIN GOVERNMENT AS INDEFENSIBLE, AND THIS ALSO HAD BEEN THE POSITION OF THE MEIR GOVERNMENT BEFORE IT.

3. THERE IS ALSO A NEARLY UNANIMOUS CONSENSUS IN ISRAEL AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN STATE ON THE WEST BANK AND THE GAZA STRIP. INDEED, THE MEIR AND RABIN GOVERNMENTS ALSO HAD BEEN OPPOSED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A THIRD STATE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND JORDAN AS THE SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. THE TENTRALLY ACCEPTED VIEW HERE IS THAT THIS THIRD STATE SOONER OR LATER WOULD PASS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PLO, REGARDLESS

OF WHAT ITS NOMINAL LEADERSHIP MIGHT BE. THIS PLO-CONTROLLED STATE, IT IS BELIEVED HERE, WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE IRREDENTIST ASPIRATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL AND POSSIBLY ALSO AGAINST JORDAN. ANOTHER WIDELY-HELD ISRAELI VIEW IS THAT A PALESTINIAN STATE ON THE WEST BANK AND GAZA WOULD RAPIDLY FALL UNDER SOVIET CONTROL, FURTHER DESTABILIZING THE AREA AND ENDANGERING ISRAEL. THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR HAS ALSO LEFT ITS IMPACT, CONVINCING MANY ISRAELIS THAT AN AUTONOMOUS PALESTINIAN POLITICAL ENTITY ON ITS BORDER WOULD ENGULF ISRAEL IN A SIMILAR TRAGEDY.

4. THERE IS NOT, HOWEVER, A POSITIVE NATIONAL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEL AV 04658 01 OF 02 271700Z

CONSENSUS IN ISRAEL ON THE DISPOSITION OF THE WEST BANK IN A FINAL PEACE SETTLEMENT. BEGIN AND DAYAN, BY EMPHASIZING THE NEGATIVE CONSENSUS DESCRIBED ABOVE, TO SOME EXTENT MAY HAVE BLURRED THIS DISTINCTION IN ORDER TO SUGGEST TO INER-NATIONAL MEDIA THAT ALL ISRAELI PARTIES, EXCEPT SHELLI AND RAKAH, AGREE ENTIRELY WITH THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH.

5. ISRAELIS HAVE LONG DISAGREED AMONG THEMSELVES ABOUT THE WEST BANK. ON ONE LEVEL, THERE HAS BEEN A DEBATE BETWEEN PRAGMATISTS AND IDEOLOGUES, BETWEEN THOSE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04658 02 OF 02 271714Z
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4658

PREPARED TO TRY TO ACCOMMODATE COMPETING ARAB CLAIMS IN A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE ARABS AND THE INTRNATIONAL COMMUNITY OUGHT INSTEAD TO RECOGNIZE THE INHERENT RIGHT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL. IN 1947-48, THIS DEBATE PITTED BEN GURION'S LABOR CAMP FAVORING ACCEPTANCE OF THE UNGA PARTITION PLAN AGAINST BEGIN'S REVISIONIST MOVEMENT PREFERING TO HOLD OUT FOR INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF ITS CLAIM TO MANDATORY PALESTINE. AFTER THE 1967 WAR, IT BECAME A DEBATE BEWEEN PROPONENTS OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH JORDAN BASED ON TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE AND THOSE WHO ADVOCATED RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK OUT OF A COMBINATION OF HISTROCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND/OR CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 04658 02 OF 02 271714Z

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS. THE DEBATE IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS CUT ACROSS PARTY LINES AND CONTINUES TO DO SO TODAY.

6. UNDER THE MEIR AND RABIN GOVERNMENTS, THE DEBATE FOCUSSSED MORE ON IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERA-TIONS, AND WAS CARRIED OUT LARGELY INSIDE THE LABOR ALIGNMENT. BEGIN'S VIEWS WERE KNOWN BUT WERE LARGELY DISCOUNTED SINCE HE WAS ON THE SIDELINES OF POWER. IN THE MEIR GOVERNMENT, THE DEBATE PITTED THEN FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN AND FINANCE MINISTER SAPIR AGAINST THEN DEFENSE MINISTER DAYAN. EBAN AND SAPIR ARGUED THAT ISRAEL WOULD LOSE ITS JEWISH AND DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER IF IT INSISTED ON PERMANENT RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK. YIGAL ALLON PROPOSED THE WELL-KNOWN PLAN CARRYING HIS NAME FOCUSSING PRIMARILY ON SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS. THE MEIR AND RABIN GOVERNMENTS ESTABLISHED SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK IN ACCORDANCE WITH THAT PLAN ALTHOUGH IT WAS NEVER

FORMALLY ADOPTED. DAYAN, AFTER INITIALLY SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO SEEK A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH JORDAN BASEDON THE PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE, OPTED LATER FOR A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH IN WHICH ISRAEL WOULD RETAIN ITS MILITARY PRESENCE WHILE JORDAN WOULD EXERCISE ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY OVER CIVILIAN MATTERS AND WEST BANK RESIDENTS WOULD RETAN THEIR JORDANIAN CITIZENSHIP. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THIS REMAINS HIS POSITION.

7. THE INTERNAL DEBATE CONTINUES TODAY, ALBEIT IN MUTED FORM. THE MAINSTREAM OF THE LABOR ALIGNMENT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 04658 02 OF 02 271714Z

(EXCEPT MAPAM) TENDS TO FAVOR A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE BASED ON THE ALON PLAN. THE DMC ALSO FAVORS A COMPARABLE APPROACH. PERES IN THE KNESSET WARNED AGAINST THE DANGER OF LIKUD'S "NOT AN INCH" APPROACH--AS HE DESCRIBED IT. YADIN SAID HE PREFERRED "A STRONG PEOPLE IN PART OF THE HOMELAND RATHER THAN A WEAK PEOPLE IN ALL OF IT." ON THE OTHER HAND, BEGIN AND DAYAN FAVOR ISRAELI RETENTION OF THE WEST BANK, AND DAYAN SAID LAST WEEK THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT PROPOSE A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT BASED ON ITS PARTITION. IN A FORMAL SENSE, THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY THEIR COALITION MEMBERS IN THE LIKUD AND THE RELIGIOS PARTIES ALTHOUGH THE ACTUAL SITUATION IS MORE COMPLICATED. POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE LIBERALS, SOME NRP MEMBERS AND AGUDA ISRAEL WOULD GIVE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO SUPPORTING A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE ON THE WEST BANK IF IT WERE CRYSTAL-CLEAR THAT THE TRADE-OFF WAS PEACE IN THE FULLEST SENSE.

8. THE OPPONENTS OF THE BEGIN/DAYAN APPROACH ARE DISADVANTAGED TODAY FOR THREE REASONS. FIRST, THEY ARE IN THE OPPOSITION. SECOND, THE U.S. PUBLICLY-STATED APPROACH GOES BEYOND WHAT THEY REGARD AS AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION. THIRD, THE ARABS DEMAND FULL WITHDRAWAL AND APPEAR TO BE UNINTERESTED IN A WEST BANK TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE. INDEED, IT WAS ON THESE GROUNDS THAT DAYAN PROPOSED INTHE KNESSET ON JUNE 20 THAT THE INTERNAL DEBATE ON ALTERNATE SOLUTIONS FOR THE EST BANK BE SUSPENDED. WE BELIEVE IT LIKELY THAT THE INTERNAL OPPOSITION TO THE BEGIN/DAYAN APPROACH WILL REMAIN MUTED IN THE WEKKS AHEAD. EVEN THOSE WHO DISAGREE SHARPLY WITH THAT APPROACH ARE INCLINED TO WAIT AT LEAST UNTIL THE BEGIN/CARTER MEETING BEFORE DECIDING

HOW VIGOROUSLY TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS. AS ONE
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 04658 02 OF 02 271714Z

DMC MEMBER PUT IT TO US, THE OPPOSITION
TO THE BEGIN/DAYAN APPROACH WITHIN ISRAEL WILL
LARGELY BE DETERMINED BY THE POSTURE TAKEN BY
THE UNITED STATES.

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Message Attributes

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